

## **Statement**

On December 24, 1998, the Upper Kanawha Valley Enterprise Community (UKVEC) of Kanawha and Fayette Counties, West Virginia, was established by the Community Empowerment Board chaired by Vice-President Al Gore. The simple premise behind the establishment of the organization and other Empowerment Zones and Enterprise Communities was to abolish poverty and assist the businesses and residents of their respected areas. With 25% of the UKVEC population in the poverty level, the time had come to enact an organization that has the capability of collaborating other organizations, programs, funding, and new initiatives. From the past three years experience with the UKVEC, it's very evident the intent of the past White House administration was to empower local citizens and groups.

The UKVEC receives a small allocation of funding through the U.S. Department of Agriculture to enact projects and organize new programs. Every year, it's apparent that our group has a duty to convince Congress and others of the UKVEC's progress in revitalizing the community it represents. The facts are simple about Enterprise Communities and Empowerment Zones, they attract funding and they provide results. Results such as job creation, community centers, infrastructure, training and educational programs, health clinics, recreation, and so much more. How are these projects started and supported? Enterprise Communities and Empowerment Zones are locally based with their governing boards represented primarily by local residents, local business owners, and local elected officials. Professional staffs are assembled that have expertise in funding, state and federal programs, and community and economic development. With little experience or knowledge from organizations and residents of these rural areas, it's clear that the transfer of information and resources is prevalent by acquiring experienced, development minded staff that illustrate new ideas from different arenas. By bringing the governing boards and staff together, new avenues are created and hence new initiatives are developed.

Success from the UKVEC can be measured in several respects. It can be measured by the amount of new programs and funding. It can be illustrated by its increased involvement from several organizations in and around the UKVEC. We can show the increased volunteerism and community participation through the UKVEC and its partner organizations. As chairman of the UKVEC, I can say that success can be measured by the new opportunities the program brings. I can also say that success is not measured by a benchmark or a regulatory report. True progress is best illustrated when projects are conceived, funded, and developed by local individuals. The underlying fact is that many rural communities are not represented by federal, state, and other non-profit organizations. Unincorporated areas are most likely ignored or dismissed for programs and funding consideration. This is an integral part of Enterprise Communities.

## **Oral Testimony**

The Upper Kanawha Valley Enterprise Community (UKVEC) has been in existence for three years dated April 12, 2002. The UKVEC is made up of two counties in West Virginia, Kanawha and Fayette. Our territory takes in three census tracts with an approximate population of 20,000 residents. Five municipalities are within the UKVEC along with several unincorporated areas. The UKVEC is a mountainous territory with many creek areas and two-lane roads. The population of the area is made up of mostly fixed income, senior citizens. The UKVEC does have some assets to the area that are instrumental to the revitalization of the communities; Kanawha and Fayette County Commissions, the five municipalities, West Virginia University Institute of Technology, Cabin Creek Health Clinic, Upper Kanawha Valley YMCA, Chelyan and Upper Kanawha Valley Public Service Districts, Montgomery General Hospital, watershed organizations, small businesses, and a handful of secondary schools.

For the past several decades, the Upper Kanawha Valley has been dominated by the coal and timber industries. Today, several mines are open or reopening in our area. Most communities are colored with the coal activity. Coal is one of West Virginia's assets, its one of our strengths, and it will continue to provide jobs and revenue to our area and the state. Other possibilities wouldn't be present without coal. However, the UKVEC and other organizations recognize the need for new industries and technology to attract the youthful industries. Demolition and the persistence to clean-up developable sites will be key to the construction of new buildings and sites to attract new companies.

Infrastructure development such as water and sewer extensions have covered most of the UKVEC. High-speed transmission lines, new technology firms, and the development of curriculum at all educational institutions have elevated the new opportunities for technologically based companies. Organizations in the Upper Kanawha Valley realize the importance of its past and the realization of its future. Reinvigorated energy and aggressiveness is needed to serve as a catalyst for improved ideas and a mainstay for future development. The revitalization of the area is only instrumental with the retention of educated individuals and persistence of proven leadership in West Virginia. Leadership is evident in West Virginia, but the method to attracting and retaining highly trained and educated individuals to West Virginia is complex and critical. New buildings, structures, and industrial parks are under or soon will be under construction to provide new opportunities that were previously not present. There is a need to restructure the Upper Kanawha Valley and make it an attractive place to live, learn, work, and play.

In West Virginia and in many parts of the United States, there are many in need of assistance, either financially, educationally, or in a health respect. Having an organization to collaborate ideas, knowledge, and efforts is an advantage most communities do not enjoy. The simplicity behind organizing and assisting those in need is leadership. With the UKVEC's diligence and persistence toward making a better Upper Kanawha Valley, many have followed and supported what progress means to those in need. Countless examples have included contributions from various organizations on a common cause; improve the area, improve the climate for new business, improve access to clean water, improve the access to health care, improve

transportation to and from the workplace, improve the sanctity and viability of a community deserving those measures.

In the past three years, the UKVEC has leveraged more than \$84 million in federal, state, local, and private funding and assistance toward various projects. This makes us one of the top five Enterprise Communities in the nation with the amount of leveraged funding and assistance into the UKVEC. The UKVEC has established one health clinic and is in the process of establishing another. We have raised millions of dollars for water and sewer. We have established computer labs, meals programs, and after-school recreational and educational programs. In conjunction with the Southern Appalachian Labor School, we are currently the largest housing rehabilitation provider in the United States. We have sponsored hundreds of workshops, meetings, or seminars to bring about new opportunities. The UKVEC does not perform these functions alone. With the assistance of the governing board and staff, the practice of self-sustaining measures has been orchestrated and demonstrated to numerous individuals and organizations. The UKVEC, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the U.S. Congress cannot be the only means to progress and answers to the problems that persist on a daily basis. Once the countless organizations, businesses, and residents are given the experience to initiate ideas, conduct meetings, develop strategic plans, request funding, and implement strategy on their own, will there be a harmonious group who will stride to make improvements to their communities. This I believe to be one of the most crucial tasks and rewards of the Enterprise Community program.

The Upper Kanawha Valley and West Virginia are accelerating toward an improved way of life. New economic opportunities are arising, new leadership has emerged and energized new initiatives, organizations are leading the way to shape old programs into bright ideas and the births of invigorated concepts. West Virginia is not in a transition state from past industries such as coal and timber, West Virginia is an emerging state with tremendous opportunity. The opportunities have always been there, they just haven't been explored and developed. This is another important goal of the UKVEC, find new opportunities for the businesses and residents of the Upper Kanawha Valley.

Has West Virginia lacked in leadership? No. Has West Virginia lacked in determination? No. Have the residents and businesses of West Virginia and the United States been more deserving of organizations such as Empowerment Zones and Enterprise Communities? Yes.

The UKVEC thanks Congresswoman Shelley Moore Capito and her staff for their tremendous efforts in making a better West Virginia. The UKVEC also thanks Congressman Nick Rahall and his staff for their support and hard work in West Virginia. Their support is unfathomable and unwavering. The UKVEC also thanks the Finance Committee of the U.S. Congress in permitting the UKVEC to express its support for the Empowerment Zone and Enterprise Community program.